

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO AMMAN BEIRUT CAIRO TEL AVIV
FROM DAMASCUS DTD 19 APR 1976 QUOTE

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 2393

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, IS, SY, LE

SUBJECT: MEETING OF SENATORS MATHIAS, ABOUREZK AND EAGLETON
WITH PRESIDENT ASAD

1. SENATORS MATHIAS, ABOUREZK AND EAGLETON, ACCOMPANIED
BY AMBASSADOR, HAD TWO-HOUR MEETING WITH PRESIDENT ASAD
APRIL 18. IMPORTANT POINTS OF CONVERSATION ARE SUMMARIZED
BELOW. THIS SUMMARY HAS NOT BEEN CLEARED WITH CODELS.
MEMCON BEING POUCHED NEA.

2. THE MIDDLE EAST.

SENATOR EAGLETON ASKED, ASSUMING THAT ASAD'S POLICY
IN LEBANON WORKED AND THAT FURTHER STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY
WAS NOT POSSIBLE, WHAT PRACTICAL APPROACH MIGHT BE
FOLLOWED TO ACHIEVE A SETTLEMENT? ASAD REPLIED
HE HAD READ RECENT STATEMENT BY SECRETARY KISSINGER
THAT HE THOUGHT STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH WAS NOW OUT OF
QUESTION. WHAT WAS NEEDED NOW, ASAD SAID, WAS
OVERALL SETTLEMENT. ALL PARTIES COULD GO TO GENEVA

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OR MAYBE A DRAFT PLAN FOR OVERALL SETTLEMENT SHOULD

BE PROPOSED AND THEN ALL PARTIES GO TO GENEVA.
SHOULD U.S. PROPOSE SUCH A PLAN, EAGLETON ASKED.
POSSIBLY, ASAD REPLIED, PROVIDED PLAN WAS PRECISE AND
JUST. IT WOULD BE VERY DANGEROUS FOR A SUPERPOWER
TO PROPOSE A DEFICIENT PLAN. AS TO ELEMENTS OF A JUST
PLAN, ASAD SAID, WHEN SYRIA HAD AGREED TO UNSC RES 338
IT WAS ON BASIS OF FULL WITHDRAWAL FROM THE OCCUPIED
TERRITORIES AND GUARANTEES OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS.

3. MATHIAS ASKED HOW ANY PLAN COULD COPE WITH NUMBER
OF PALESTINIANS INVOLVED. WHAT PRACTICAL STEPS COULD
BE TAKEN TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTING UNSC RES 242? ASAD SAID
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN WAS REQUIRED, INCLUDING TOTAL
WITHDRAWAL, CREATION OF PALESTINIAN STATE AND ENDING
STATE OF WAR. SUCH A PLAN WOULD ALSO PROVIDE SOLUTION
FOR PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN ACCORDANCE WITH UN RESOLUTIONS.
NO MIRACLE WAS REQUIRED IF THE WILL FOR PEACE EXISTED. BASICALLY,
IT WAS PROBLEM FOR U.S. HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR U.S. ISRAEL
COULD NOT HAVE REJECTED ALL SOLUTIONS THE WAY IT HAS.
IN RESPONSE FURTHER QUESTION ASAD SAID THAT NUMBERS WHO
WOULD ACTUALLY RETURN WOULD BE MATTER FOR PLO TO DISCUSS.
ARAFAT HAD TALKED WITH SEVERAL CONGRESSMEN AND HAD TOLD
THEM "LET US FIRST ESTABLISH A PALESTINIAN STATE." ARAFAT
HAD ALSO TOLD THEM HIS IDEA WAS THEN FOR PEACEFUL STRUGGLE
FOR SECULAR STATE OF PALESTINE SHARED BY ARABS
AND JEWS. PERHAPS, ASAD ADDED, NEW IDEAS WILL EMERGE.
WHAT IF, FOR EXAMPLE, JEWS ORIGINALLY FROM ARAB
COUNTRIES WERE TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES? ARAB
COUNTRIES WOULD ACCEPT THEM BACK AND ISRAEL WOULD THEN
HAVE TO ACCEPT PALESTINIANS BACK IN THEIR HOMES.
SUCH INTERMINGLING COULD CREATE BETTER UNDERSTANDING.
WE KNOW, HE NOTED, THAT MAJORITY OF JEWS AFROM ARAB
COUNTRIES ARE NOT TREATED ON EQUAL FOOTING IN ISRAEL.
IN CONDITIONS OF PEACE, LARGE PERCENTAGE OF THEM WOULD
RETURN TO ARAB COUNTRIES.

4. LEBANON.

ASAD SAID SYRIAN ATTITUDE TOWARD LEBANON WAS NOT
BASED ON CONFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS. SOME ACCUSED
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SYRIA OF SIDING WITH CHRISTIANS WHILE MAJORITY OF
SYRIANS ARE MUSLIMS, BUT SYRIA BELIEVES ITS ATTITUDE
IS ONE OF JUSTICE.

5. ABOUREZK ASKED WHY ISRAEL HAD NOT REACTED TO SENDING
OF SYRIAN TROOPS INTO LEBANON? ASAD REPLIED, "ASK
DR. KISSINGER. U.S. IS PLAYING A ROLE IN LEBANON." ASAD
SAID U.S. WAS TRYING TO PREVENT SYRIA FROM INTERVENING

IN LEBANON. ESSENCE OF THE MANY MESSAGES WHICH HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO HIM BY AMBASSADOR HAD BEEN THAT IT WOULD BE DANGEROUS FOR SYRIA TO SEND IN TROOPS. U.S. WAS AGAINST SYRIAN INTERVENTION. SYRIA TAKES IT FOR GRANTED, ASAD ADDED, THAT ISRAEL ALSO OPPOSES ITS INTERVENTION. REGARDLESS OF THIS ATTITUDE, HOWEVER, AND EVEN IF ISRAEL WERE TO TAKE ACTION, SYRIA WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY ITS ROLE, SINCE LEBANESE AND SYRIANS ARE ONE PEOPLE. THE U.S., HE SAID AGAIN, WAS INVOLVED IN LEBANESE EVENTS AND SYRIA WISHED IT WERE NOT. ASKED ABOUT NATURE OF U.S. INVOLVEMENT, ASAD REPLIED THAT "U.S. WAS CREATING TENSION IN LEBANON." HE SAID HE SAW CLOSE CONNECTION BETWEEN EVENTS IN LEBANON AND SINAI AGREEMENT. THIS, HE ADDED, WAS REASON WHY U.S. AND ISRAEL INTENDED TO PREVENT SYRIA FROM INTERVENING, DESPITE FACT THAT SYRIA WOULD GO IN MERELY TO STOP THE FIGHTING. ALL LEBANESE SIDES TRUST US, ASAD ASSERTED. "IN GOING IN WE WOULD BE RESPONDING TO DESIRES OF NINETY PERCENT OF LEBANESE, INCLUDING CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS, AND ALSO THE PRESIDENT, PRIME MINISTER, AND MANY DEPUTIES."

6. EAGLETON ASKED IF ASAD HAD ANY HARD EVIDENCE OF ISRAELI MEDDLING IN LEBANON TO PROLONG CIVIL WAR. YES, ASAD REPLIED THEY ARE WORKING THROUGH THEIR AGENTS. ISRAEL, HE SAID, HAD HISTORICAL AMBITION TO PARTITION LEBANON, BOTH FOR IDEOLOGICAL AND FOR MILITARY CONSIDERATIONS. ISRAEL WAS A RACIST STATE AND HAD MADE RELIGION BASIS OF STATE, EVEN THOUGH THIS WAS AGAINST SPIRIT OF THE AGE. ISRAEL WANTED TO CREATE MINI-STATES LIKE ITSELF TO PROVE THAT CO-EXISTENCE BETWEEN RELIGIONS WAS IMPOSSIBLE. THIS EXPLAINED WHY ISRAEL WAS ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT LEBANESE CRISIS. TO SAY THAT SYRIAN INTERVENTION WOULD THREATEN CONFLICT BETWEEN SYRIAN AND ISRAELI TROOPS MADE NO SENSE

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SINCE THEY WERE ALREADY CONFRONTING EACH OTHER ON GOLAN. LIKEWISE, IT WAS FOOLISH TO SAY THAT SYRIAN INTERVENTION MIGHT ENCOURAGE FEDAYEEN BECAUSE FEDAYEEN ALREADY HAD FULL FREEDOM OF ACTION IN LEBANON.

7. SYRIA AND LEBANON WERE TWO ARAB COUNTRIES BOTH IN STATE OF WAR WITH ISRAEL, ASAD CONTINUED. BOTH WERE MEMBERS OF ARAB LEAGUE AND ADHERED TO ITS JOINT DEFENSE AGREEMENT. ASAD SAID HE WAS IN DAILY TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH LEBANESE PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER. HE COULD ASK TO INTERVENE OR BE ASKED TO INTERVENE. THIS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH BALANCE OF POWER IN REGION. THREATS FROM ISRAEL ONLY SHOWED ITS DESIRE TO STRIKE AT ANY ARAB COUNTRY AND ISRAEL HAD STARTED WITH LEBANON BECAUSE LEBANON WAS NOT THE ARAB WORLD'S WEAKEST LINK. SYRIA COULD ONLY INTERPRET AMERICAN

ATTITUDE AS FAVORING THESE ISRAELI INTENTIONS. ARAB PROBLEMS, ASAD STRESSED, HAD NO RELATION TO NON-ARABS AND PROBLEM OF LEBANON WAS AN INTRA-ARAB ONE.

8. AT THIS POINT AMBASSADOR INTERVENED TO SAY THAT HE WISHED TO REPEAT THAT U.S. CONCERN HAD BEEN TO SHARE WITH PRESIDENT OUR FRANK UNDERSTANDING OF ISRAELI ATTITUDES. SEEN THROUGH ISRAEL'S EYES, EVENTS IN LEBANON HAD DIRECT BEARING ON ITS NATIONAL SECURITY. U.S. COULD NOT BE GUARANTOR OF ISRAELI BEHAVIOR, WHEN IT FELT ITS SECURITY THREATENED.

9. SYRIAN JEWS.

SENATOR ABOUREZK COMMENTED THAT MIKE WALLACE SHOW ON SYRIAN JEWS HAD PRESENTED GOOD IMAGE OF SYRIA AND PRESIDENT ASAD. ASAD REPLIED THAT SYRIA DID NOT HAVE RELIGIOUS FANATICISM BETWEEN CITIZENS. IF JEWS WERE SOMETIMES REGARDED IN A CERTAIN LIGHT THIS WAS FAULT OF ZIONISM IN TRYING TO IN-GATHER ALL JEWS. SYRIAN STATE HAD NOTHING AGAINST ANY SYRIAN JEW AS A JEW BUT ONLY AGAINST SYRIAN JEW WHO MIGHT THINK OF HIMSELF AS OTHER THAN SYRIAN. SAME REASONING APPLIED TO CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS. ONE MUST BE LOYAL TO ONE'S COUNTRY. LIKEWISE, ASAD ADDED, SYRIA HAD NOTHING AGAINST U.S. JEWS BUY ONLY THOSE AMONG THEM WHO GAVE THEIR LOYALTY TO ISRAEL AND
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NOT TO U.S. IT WAS NOT NATURAL FOR A CITIZEN TO GIVE UP HIS LOYALTY TO HIS OWN COUNTRY.

10. IN CLOSING, SENATOR MATHIAS COMMENTED THAT WHEN HE VISITED DAMASCUS OVER A YEAR AGO HE HAD BEEN FIRST MEMBER OF SENATOR TO DO SO. NOW THREE SENATORS WERE VISITING -- TWO OF THEM DEMOCRATS. THIS DEMONSTRATED THAT WHATEVER MIGHT BE RESULT OF U.S. ELECTION, THERE WAS VERY REAL INTEREST IN U.S. IN HELPING ACHIEVE JUST SETTLEMENT. PROCESS OF EDUCATION WAS GOING SLOWLY FORWARD. THIS WAS ONE OF THE REASONS HE HAD VISITED WITH ARAFAT. SPEAKING PERSONALLY, HE WOULD HATE TO SEE ANY INCIDENT WHICH MIGHT DISRUPT THIS PROCESS OF ON-GOING EDUCATION. SUCH AN INCIDENT MIGHT LEAD THE U.S. TO REACT ALONG OLD LINES OF POLICY BEFORE NEW ONES HAD BEEN LAID DOWN. ASAD SAID HE AGREED WITH THE SENATOR AND HE WAS PLEASED TO HAVE U.S. CONGRESSMEN VISIT SYRIA AND GAIN BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF REGION AND PROBLEM. AS CONGRESSMEN STUDIES SITUATION, THEY WOULD BECOME MORE AWARE THAT U.S. INTERESTS IN BOTH SHORT AND LONG TERM WERE WITH THE ARABS. MATHIAS SAID HE WOULD BE GOING TO JERUSALEM IN A FEW DAYS AND WHILE THERE HE WOULD REPEAT TO RABIN

WHAT HE HAD TOLD HIM A YEAR AGO -- THAT IN HIS JUDGMENT
AMERICAN PEOPLE WOULD NOT SUPPORT ANY KIND OF PREEMPTIVE
ACTION BY ISRAEL NOR WOULD THEY SUPPORT ANY DISRUPTION IN
THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING A POSITIVE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN
AMERICAN AND ARAB PEOPLES.

11. SENATORS REQUEST COPIES OF THIS MESSAGE BE PROVIDED
THEIR OFFICES.
MURPHY UNQTE ROBINSON

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